ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1908

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

TO THE

AYLSHAM RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

TO THE

Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen of the Aylsham Rural District Council.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I beg to submit the following Report on the Health and Sanitary condition of your District for the year 1908.

POPULATION.—Seven years have now elapsed since the last census, and consequently the figure representing the population of the District "estimated to the middle of the year 1908" becomes a somewhat uncertain quantity. Rather than make an attempt at guessing this number, I prefer to adopt the method of the Registrar General and assume that the average annual variation has been maintained since the last census. In the ten years 1891 to 1901, the population of the district decreased by 400, or an average annual decrease of 40. In the Eynsford Sub-District the rate of decrease was 45, but this was, to a small extent, compensated for by an average annual increase of 5 in the Buxton Sub-District.

Basing my calculations on the above assumption, I estimate the population of the Eynsford Sub-District to be 7,531; the Buxton Sub-District, 9,242; and that of the whole District 16,773.

BIRTHS.—There were 401 births registered in the District during the past year, which gives a birth-rate of 23·9. Although this is a slight improvement on last year, it is still below the average for the previous ten years, and very much below the birth-rate of Rural England and Wales for 1908, which stands at 26·2.

The Eynsford shows a higher birth-rate than the Buxton Sub-District. This is contrary to expectation, as the former has a declining and the latter an increasing population, and leads me to think that there must be an error in the estimated population of the two Sub-Districts.

Illegitimate births numbered 27, the Eynsford Sub-District contributing 11, and the Buxton 16, to the total.

DEATHS.—The number of deaths registered was 241, giving a death-rate for the District of 14·3. This may be considered satisfactory, for although it is somewhat higher than last year, it compares favourably with the 1908 death-rate of rural England and Wales, which is a few points higher, viz.: 14·7.

A great difference appears in the death rate of the Eynsford Sub-District (17·5), and the Buxton Sub-District (11·9), which confirms my opinion as to there being a faulty estimation of the population of the two Sub-Districts.

INFANTILE MORTALITY.—The deaths of infants under one year numbered 36, the proportion to 1000 births being 89·7. This compares favourably with the infantile mortality rate of previous years in the District, the average for the last ten years being 107·5. It is also considerably below the figure given for the mortality among infants in England and Wales for 1908, which, for Rural Districts, stands at 110 per 1000 births.

The study of Table VI., which gives an analysis of the causes which brought about the deaths of these 36 infants, shows that 24, or two-thirds of the total number, were the result of either premature birth (11), whooping cough (10), or congenital defects (3). This leaves 12 deaths which might very possibly be due in some measure to the ignorance of the mother in the feeding and general care of her infant. Eight out of the 12 were certified as dying from "Wasting Diseases," which include Starvation, Atrophy, Debility, etc. Two to Diarrhœal Diseases (Gastritis and Enteritis), and the remaining two to Bronchitis and Convulsions respectively.

It would obviously be absurd to attempt to draw deductions from a total of 36 deaths of infants, occuring in a single year and confined to the limited area of the Aylsham Rural District, but it is satisfactory to have to record a generally low infantile mortality, and to find, on analysing the causes of death, that comparatively few were due to Diarrhœal and Wasting Diseases. I have, in former Annual Reports, drawn attention to the fact that it is a far more difficult matter to obtain a regular supply of cow's milk in the country than it is in the town, where milk is brought to the door. Important as a good supply of milk is to the child-life, the difficulty in obtaining it is not altogether to the disadvantage of the country baby, as breast feeding is thereby encouraged. Where resource is had to bottle feeding, the long-tubed feeding bottle, which is fashionable in the District, is responsible for much infantile suffering and not a few deaths.

The education of mothers in the care of their infants is the surest way of reducing infantile mortality, and I am glad that the Aylsham Rural District Council are doing something in this direction, by seeing that every mother, at the time of the registration of the birth of her infant, receives a copy of Miss Bernard Boyce's valuable pamphlet on the feeding and management of infants.

OLD AGE MORTALITY.—Out of a total of 241 deaths at all ages, 123 were of persons over 65 years of age, that is more than 50 per cent.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

Cases notified—41. Rate per 1000 population—2·44. Zymotic Death-rate (seven diseases)—1.25.

During the past year, Notifiable Infectious Disease has not shown itself in epidemic form. The 41 notifications received were distributed over as many as 15 parishes, and only two fatal cases have to be recorded.

Of the Un-notifiable Infectious Diseases, Whooping Cough was by far the most conspicuous. This subtle disease claimed 16 victims, 10 of whom were children under one year of age. Whooping Cough is not treated with that amount of respect to which its power for evil entitles it. Scarlet Fever is regarded with awe, while Whooping Cough, with its heavy death-roll, is classed among the minor ailments incidental to the early years of childhood. The difficulties met with in combating epidemic Whooping Cough are very great, owing chiefly to its intense infectiveness, and to the fact that in its early stages, when the patient is able to move about and distribute infection, its true nature is rarely recognised. The responsibilities of parents with regard to this malady are very great.

The following table gives the distribution, according to locality, of all infectious disease notified during the year :

Table shewing distribution of Notified Infectious Disease.

	Aylsham.	Brampton.	Buxton.	Cawston.	Coltishall.	Foulsham.	Hackford.	Hevingham.	Hindolveston.	Marsham.	Oxnead.	Scottow.	Themelthorpe.	Wickmere.	Wood Norton.	Totals.
Diphtheria	3	1	3		5			2						1	1	16
Erysipelas.....	2		1		2						1					6
Scarlet Fever....	3			2	2				4	1		1				13
Enteric Fever....	2					1	1			1						5
Puerperal Fever													1			1
Totals....	10	1	4	2	9	1	1	2	4	2	1	1	1	1	1	41

SCARLET FEVER.—There has been no epidemic of this disease. The 13 cases notified were for the most part mild in type, and, as will be seen from the following table, they were fairly uniformly distributed over the twelve months. Isolation of the cases was carried out as far as circumstances permitted, and presented no unusual difficulties. In one instance, where the patient lived in a house used as a Telephone Call Office and Exchange, the Call Office was at once transferred to other premises.

There were no deaths from Scarlet Fever.

Table shewing Incidence of Scarlet Fever.

	Aylsham.	Cawston.	Coltishall.	Hindolveston.	Marsham.	Scottow.	Totals.
January		1					1
February		1					1
March							
April							
May.....					1		1
June							
July							
August			1			1	2
September							
October			1				1
November	1						1
December	2			4			6
Totals....	3	2	2	4	1	1	13

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ENTERIC FEVER.—Five cases were notified in the course of the year, and none were fatal. The two in Aylsham did not appear to be connected in any way with previous cases in the town, and presented no special points of interest. In both cases insanitary conditions were found and remedied. The Hackford case was of a mild type; the source of the infection could not be traced. The Marsham case occurred in the village shop, and at the time of my visit was being nursed by relations of the patient, who also attended to the business of the shop. I strongly urged the necessity of a trained nurse, and by the kind help of the Rector, one was quickly procured. That no other cases followed was due, I believe, in no small measure to the care and skill exercised by the nurse. There was discovered no clear evidence of the origin of the infection, but it is interesting to note that the patient informed me that she seldom ate shelfish, but on Saturday, November 29th, she enjoyed some cockles, and was taken ill with her attack of Enteric six days after that date. The cockles were from Brancaster. The remaining case was notified from Foulsham. At the back of the patient's cottage was a yard, in which were found insanitary refuse bins and sunk privy pits. These conditions have since been remedied. Bearing on a possible source of infection, I find in my notes that the patient told me that seven days before he was taken ill he had eaten cockles, but previous to that he had eaten no shelfish for several months. The cockles were from Stiffkey. There are no sufficient grounds for suspecting the cockles in these two instances to be infected, and it is quite probable that I have merely recorded coincidencss. Indeed, shellfish are a very easily obtained and popular luxury in the Aylsham District, and were they a common cause of Enteric Fever, the disease would not be of such rare occurrence as it is.

DIPHTHERIA.—In my Annual Report for 1907 I recorded the fact that in that year there had been a sudden incrudescence of this disease, and that whereas in the previous ten years the average annual number of cases notified had been four, in 1907 the number rose to thirty-two. In the past year sixteen cases have been notified, so that, although this is just half the number in 1907, Diphtheria still continues far more prevalent in the District than formerly.

By referring to the Tables showing the distribution of notified infectious disease it will be seen that six parishes were affected, and that three of these, viz. : Aylsham, Coltishall, and Wood Norton were also affected the year before.

There were two deaths registered as due to Diphtheria These occurred in a family in Coltishall, where the serious nature of the disease was not recognised by the parents until too late.

Prophylactic injections of anti-toxin have been used with good effect in limiting outbreaks. Towards the end of the year arrangements were made by the Sanitary Committee for bacteriological examinations to be made of swabs taken from throats of children who had recovered from Diphtheria, so that no child should return to school unless its throat was shown to be free from infection. This action of the Committee was taken at the instigation of the County Medical Officer of Health, and of its importance there can be no doubt, since again and again such examinations have shown that a child, who has apparently perfectly recovered from its illness, may retain in its throat specific infection capable of transmitting the disease to others.

SMALLPOX.—There has been no case of Smallpox in the District since the year 1902, when a single case was imported from Cambridge, and the present Isolation Hospital was erected.

VACCINATION.

IN THE EYNSFORD SUB-DISTRICT.

Primary Vaccinations	162 (Births 191)
Children exempted under the Conscience Clause	5
Summonses taken out...	0
Re-Vaccinations	1

IN THE BUXTON SUB-DISTRICT.

Primary Vaccinations	141 (Births 210)
Children exempted under the Conscience Clause	28
Summonses	0
Re-Vaccinations	2

It will be seen from the above account of Vaccination for the year that the new Vaccination Act has not affected the number of Primary Vaccinations in the Eynsford Sub-District. There were but five children for whom exemption was claimed as against six in the year before. In the Buxton Sub-District on the other hand there has been a large increase in the number of exemptions. The births in this Sub-District for the year numbered 210 and the Primary Vaccinations only 141, which is not a satisfactory state of affairs.

My enquiries into the amount of Re-vaccination carried out in the District shows that the public do not take advantage of the complete protection from Smallpox offered by free re-vaccination.

TUBERCULOSIS.—The 1908 Regulations of the Local Government Board with respect to Tuberculosis take effect from January, 1909, and therefore do not influence the year under review. It seems nevertheless desirable to give in this present Report some prominence to the subject, and I have, therefore, prepared the following Table, showing the mortality from Tubercular disease in 1908 and the eight previous years.

Year.	Deaths from Pulmonary Phthisis.	Deaths from other Tubercular Diseases.	Deaths from all Tubercular Diseases.	Tubercular death-rate per 1000 population.
1900.	14	9	23	
1901.	19	3	22	
1902.	16	2	18	
1903.	20	3	23	
1904.	14	3	17	
1905.	13	7	20	
1906.	20	3	23	
1907.	18	2	20	
Average for 8 years.	16·7	4	20·7	
1908.	15	2	17	1·01

The Table shows an annual average of rather more than twenty deaths from Tubercular disease, mainly lung consumption. This means that more than one person out of every thousand of the inhabitants in the District dies from some form of consumption every year.

The number of deaths varies little from year to year, but in 1908 the mortality was slightly below the usual rate.

Under the new Regulations, the Medical Officer of Health receives notification of cases of Phthsis occurring among "Poor Persons" only, and in the Aylsham District the number of cases notified will probably not exceed ten in the course of a year. When the detailed line of action to be taken in these cases is considered, it will be well to take into account the probability of some wider range of the notification of Pulmonary Phthsis in the near future. It should be known that in many Districts voluntary notification by medical men is invited by the Sanitary Authority, and that it is within the powers of any Sanitary Authority to pay reasonable fees for such notifications. I advise, however, in this District that for the present we try to learn how to make practical use of the advantages to be derived from the notification of Phthsis among "Poor Persons" before proceeding further.

ISOLATION HOSPITAL.—An iron building was erected near Aylsham in 1902, for the reception of a patient suffering from Smallpox. It still remains, and has accommodation for three patients and a nurse. At the present time, it is furnished for one patient and a nurse, and although it has not been made use of since the reception of the Smallpox case seven years ago, it has been kept in a good state of repair, and at regular intervals fires have been lighted and the stores aired. It cannot be said, however, that the hospital is held in readiness for the reception at any time of a case of infectious disease. Before a patient could be admitted, stores would have to be replenished, a nurse secured, and a tent or some other accommodation provided for a man to act as carrier of water and fuel and general messenger. Arrangements would also have to be made for the conveyance of the patient from, perhaps, some distant part of the District. It will thus be recognised that very considerable expense would have to be incurred before the machinery was set in motion, and some days would elapse before the patient was installed in the hospital. In the meantime, circumstances might have arisen which would render the removal of the patient inadvisable, or the outbreak might have extended beyond the resources of the hospital and made it of no avail. It is for these reasons that the hospital has not been made use of for the isolation of the ordinary cases of Diphtheria and Scarlet Fever which have occurred in the District; and the fact that it has not been so made use of for the last seven years may be taken as proof of its uselessness for such purposes. In the face of this admission, I would still advise that the hospital be retained as heretofore, in a state of repair. It is impossible to say how soon it may be urgently needed for the isolation of another case of Smallpox; or it may, perhaps, one day take its place in a scheme of Isolation Hospitals for general purposes organised for the County.

SANITARY CONDITION OF THE DISTRICT.

The work of the two Inspectors continues to be carried out in a satisfactory way. The Sanitary Committee at their fortnightly meetings review in a most thorough manner the report presented by each Inspector for his Sub-district. The books which contain these carefully drawn reports, and record the action taken on them by the Committee, are good evidence of the large amount of useful sanitary work carried out in the District in the course of a year.

I have made periodical inspections of the District in company with the Inspectors during the year, when special attention has been given to the registered dairies.

HOUSE ACCOMMODATION.—The type of cottage varies greatly in different localities. There are groups of cottages, built no doubt originally on waste patches of land, which are best described as hovels. Examples of these are to be found on Buxton Heath and parts of Hevingham. In contrast to these are the cottages of a good type on some of the larger estates, and these are usually kept in a proper state of repair.

The Inspectors have continued to collect notes of the sanitary condition of cottages of £5 gross rental and under, and there are now ready to be entered in the register over 500 descriptions of cottages of this class. An excellent register has been produced by C. H. Barnwell, Printer, Aylsham, arranged specially to suit this district; the columns bear the following headings:—No. in Rate Book, Name and Address of Owner, Name of Occupier, Number of Bedrooms, Size of Garden, Water Supply, Description of Privy, Disposal of Slop Water, Disposal of Dry Refuse, Other Remarks.

Five cases of overcrowding have been reported, and in each some amelioration of the condition has been effected. Four filthy houses have been cleansed and whitewashed.

WATER SUPPLY.—There is no public water supply. I have nothing to add to my remarks in former Annual Reports on the general condition of the wells of the District.

During the year six new wells have been sunk, ten cleaned out, and two repaired.

DRAINAGE.—No modern system of drainage has been introduced into any of the villages of the District, but, as will be seen by a reference to former Annual Reports, much has been done in the last ten years in adapting drains originally laid for the carriage of surface water to serve as sewers. In this way great improvements have been effected in the drainage of Aylsham, Reepham, Cawston and Foulsham, so that now, in the matter of drainage, these places compare very favourably with other small towns and large villages in the County.

In Aylsham, during the past year, ten untrapped gullies have been replaced by Doulton road gullies, and two ventilating shafts have been erected. The ventilating shafts and eight of the new gullies were fixed in connection with the Cromer Road drain.

In Reepham, two Doulton road gullies have been put in, an additional ventilation shaft fixed, and 19 yards of old drain has been replaced by six-inch glazed pipe. The Reepham main drain terminates in a large settling tank, from which the drainage is carried by pipes across a meadow into an open ditch far removed from any dwelling. After passing through a series of ditches, it reaches a brook, and finally the river Wensum, though by this time all vestige of sewage must long since have disappeared. The settling tank is cleaned out four times a year, and is found to contain for the most part, fairly clean road detritus. The ditch in the meadow is cleaned out twice in the year.

The Cawston drains, which were remodeled in 1907, continue to work satisfactorily. The gullies which remain untrapped are at a distance from any house and give rise to no nuisance. The drain discharges into a meadow ditch which forms part of the basin of the river Wensum. The distance of the outlet from the river is some miles, sufficient to reduce the danger of river pollution to negligeable quantity.

The Foulsham main drain, the road gullies connected with which were some years since trapped, enters a ditch, which, in its course to "the run," passes close by some cottages. I have had no complaints of nuisance arising from this ditch, although I have made repeated enquiry. The amount of foul drainage passing through it must be very small in proportion to the surface water carried. The Foulsham "run" is a tributary of the river Wensum.

Drains on private property, especially those connecting with public sewers, have received the attention of the Inspectors and myself. Among the 43 cases of this description dealt with during the year, nine were on licensed premises.

PRIVIES AND ASHPITS.—A large proportion of nuisances necessitating structural alterations, dealt with during the year have been in connection with privies and ashpits. The number of deep privy bins and ashpits existing in the District grows less year by year, but much remains to be done in this direction. During the year, fourteen new privies have been built on the pail system and four with bins. Twenty-five privies have been repaired and 126 have been converted from the bin to the pail system; most of these conversions have been in the town of Aylsham since the adoption of Public Scavenging. Seventeen ashpits have been altered or repaired, and 45 have been replaced by Sanitary Dust-bins.

PUBLIC SCAVENGING.—Public scavenging was introduced into the District for the first time at the commencement of the year, when the system was adopted in Aylsham. At first a difficulty was experienced in finding a person willing to undertake the work. This was chiefly owing to the uncertainty as to the amount of work which would be required to be done, and it was not until September 1st that a contract was entered into with the scavenger to do the work for £78 per annum, the Sanitary Authority finding a suitable cart.

When the scavenger first entered on his duties there were but fifteen pail closets and a few dust-bins on his list. At the present time, the pail closets regularly emptied, number 155, and there are also 60 Sanitary Dust-bins on the list. The work of the scavenger appears to be carried on in a satisfactory way, and is much appreciated by the inhabitants of Aylsham. The introduction of the system has made it possible to remove a number of insanitary conditions which were a great danger to the health of the town.

The question of extending the advantages of public scavenging to some other of the large villages in the District should be considered when further experience is gained of its working in Aylsham.

SUPERVISED PREMISES.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.—Bye-laws with respect to Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milk Shops, were adopted in 1907, and there are at present 14 registered Cowkeepers in the District. In the course of the year I have devoted some time to the inspection of their premises, and have already notes of the condition of six. My notes comprise the names of the occupier and owner, the number of cows kept, the disposal of the milk, a description of the Dairy as regards dimensions, lighting, ventilation, structure of walls, nature of floor, and drainage; a description of each cowshed giving general structure, number of cows in each, cubic space, flooring, drainage, lighting, and ventilation. I have also noted, in most cases, the provision made for milkmen to wash their hands, and as to whether the flanks and udders of the cows are cleaned before milking. I find it important to enquire as to the time during which the cows are actually occuping the sheds, as in some dairies the cows are only in for an hour or two during milking, being out in the open, except in very severe weather, both night and day; while in others it is the custom for the cows to remain in the sheds for the whole of the 24 hours, with the exception of an hour for exercise in the morning.

The Bye-laws in force in the District, though somewhat vague, evidently demand that a cowshed should be a building constructed for the purpose of housing cows, and that provision should be made for proper lighting by windows, and that it be properly ventilated; that the floor should be of a material admitting of being washed, and the drainage arranged so that all liquid matter may be speedily carried to a trapped gulley outside the shed; and that it at all times be kept reasonably sweet and clean.

My investigations have shown that it is rare to find a cowshed that was originally built for the purpose. Cows are found housed in a variety of sheds adapted from barns, horse stables, bullock sheds, and bullock shelters surrounding yards. The lighting of these sheds usually depends on open half-doors, although in some instances glass tiles have been fixed in the roof. Ventilation is sometimes effected by cross tiles in the ridge, but more often it depends, as does the lighting, on the half-doors or the chinks between the boards forming one of the walls. The floors are rarely found to be of a material that can be washed. In adapted horse stables the cobble stones remain, and in adapted barns and bullock sheds, clay and rubble often form the floor. The use of water in the cleansing of the floors is almost unknown. The nature of the floors often renders any drainage of the shed of no avail. In some instances the manure is allowed to remain, fresh clean straw being placed on the top of the old as is the custom in bullock keeping.

Although the above is a fair description of the general conditions prevailing, there are, I am glad to say, some notable exceptions.

With regard to the question of tubercular disease among the cows in the District, I am not at present in a position to make any statement.

The importance, from a public health point of view, of a pure milk supply, cannot be denied, and it is equally certain that it is the duty of a Rural Sanitary Authority, in addition to securing a wholesome supply for home consumption, to ensure that milk destined for the supply of urban populations, should leave its District in a clean and unpolluted condition.

I am not prepared to advise any sweeping reforms, especially having regard to the promise of the President of the Local Government Board of a Pure Milk Bill before the end of the present session. I believe the inspections I have made have not been altogether without effect in improving the condition of existing premises, but with regard to premises which may be occupied in the future, I desire to draw the attention of the Council to Sect. 7 of the Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milk shops Order of 1885, which is as follows:—"It shall not be lawful to begin to occupy as a dairy or cowshed any building not so occupied at the commencement of this Order until provision is made, to the reasonable satisfaction of the Sanitary Authority, for the lighting and ventilation, including air-space, and the cleansing, drainage, and water supply, or without giving one month's notice in writing to the Sanitary Authority."

I strongly urge on the Council the importance of seeing that this section of the order is enforced in every case.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.—There are 19 slaughter houses in the District, all of which are under inspection. Byelaws with respect to slaughter houses have not been adopted in the District.

BAKE HOUSES.—The 25 bake houses have been inspected during the year.

HORSE SLAUGHTERERS.—There are horse slaughtering premises at Cawston and Foulsham. Both are reported by the Inspector as fairly clean and tidy, and no complaints have been received of any nuisance in connection with them.

SCHOOLS.—I have made no systematic inspection during the year, but my attention has been directed to the condition of the offices of the following schools, viz.: Aldborough, Corpustye, and Aylsham.

Aldborough. This is a new school, built a year ago by the Norfolk County Council. The offices are of the long bin type, constructed with the idea of the liquid matter draining away from the solid into a central channel, and thence into a tank. In this instance the rain water from the roof was carried into the bin, and the tank for the reception of the liquid matter was placed close to the playground railings. This arrangement did not prove satisfactory. At my suggestion the rain water was cut off from the bin, and the tank removed to a distance from the play-ground.

Corpustye. In this school new offices had been built by the Norfolk County Council about two years ago, on the same principle as those at Aldborough. The bin is 24 feet long, and constructed so as to be very inconvenient to empty. At the time of my visit it was more than half-full of offensive liquid sewage, and as it was distant from the infants' class-room only ten or twelve yards, I considered it dangerous to the health of the children. Some improvement in the structural arrangements have been made, and a better system of scavenging promised. The offices of this school will, nevertheless, require frequent visits from the Inspector to ensure that no repetition of the state of things discovered on the occasion of my visit recurs.

Aylsham. The system here has been that of a trough, flushed at intervals by water pumped into a tilting bucket. This acted fairly well so far as the closets themselves were concerned, but no proper provision had been made for the resultant sewage, which, after passing into a small tank, overflowed into a stagnant ditch close to the play-ground. Pails, which are regularly attended to by the town scavenger, have now replaced the old system.

MINOR NUISANCES.—One hundred and fourteen minor nuisances have been abated in the course of the year, but this does not include the many improvements in sanitation which have resulted from verbal advice and instructions given during inspections by myself and the inspectors.

FACTORIES' AND WORKSHOPS' ACT.—I have little to report under this heading, as the District is an agricultural one. Two cases of "want of cleanliness," and one of overcrowding in workshops, have received attention.

I have the honour to remain,

Your obedient Servant,

H. H. BACK, M.B. (Lond.),

Medical Officer of Health to the Aylsham District Council.